

CIVIC EDUCATION AND IT'S IMPERATIVE TOWARDS NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Most countries of the world today originated as a result of the activities of colonialists and imperialists who merged previously independent nations together for the sole reason of domination and exploitation. Following the end of colonial era and the resulting freedom of previously colonized people, many countries have been struggling to live together as the nation which their erstwhile colonial masters made them. This has often resulted to conflicts and crises, the worst of it being the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Due to these incidences, social researchers have intensified efforts in designing programs that will facilitate the very act of nation-building/or prevent a devastating effect that may result from a failure thereof. This paper, therefore, attempts to suggest Civic Education as one of the models that can help facilitate nation-building project especially in countries affected by the effects of colonization. The work employed the normative method of philosophy, while also not leaving behind the evaluative and analytical side of the method.

KEYWORDS

Civic, Education, Nation-building, Colonialism, Violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to historians, the modern state global colonialism or imperialism started with the age of discovery in the 15th century, led by Portuguese and then by the Spanish exploration of the Americas, the coasts of Africa, the Middle East, India and East Asia¹. However, the Berlin Conference of 1884 opened a fresh page of a more radical approach to the project of colonization. It marked the beginning of the formal colonization of Africa, which will in turn have a more devastating effect on the population than initially intended. The era of colonization in Africa in particular and the world at large, included the activities of economic expansionists, western imperialists and more importantly, the merging of previously independent nations for the sole aim of domination and control. Although all the activities of colonialists had enormous impacts on the colonized population, none of those impacts were as devastating as the attempts of colonialists to create nation-states. These attempts resulted into wars and conflicts as the various cultures that the colonialists attempted to fuse together turned out to be eternally incompatible. Most of the famous genocides in Africa for instance, owe their causes to this singular effect. Among those genocides and conflicts are the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and the Nigeria-Biafra Civil war of 1967. Even till date, many countries in Africa are still battling with internal conflicts, thanks to colonization! The constant attempt of the Somali people in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia to gain complete political independence; the recurrent problems in Sudan that have recently resulted in the creation of the independent state of Southern Sudan; and even the on-going struggle by the

¹ Benjamin, Thomas, ed. *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism Since 1450 (3 vol 2006)* p. 67.

English-speaking part of Cameroon (Ambazonia) to exist as a country of its own, can all be linked to the effects of colonization².

However, most thinkers have been on the look-out for a sustainable solution to the problems posed by nation-states, especially those states that were artificially formed by colonial masters which are now on the brink of collapse. The reasoning here is that, since the dissolution of these nation-states has become extremely difficult, if not impossible, to build them up therefore becomes the only available option. With this in mind, most researchers have come up with some programs and projects aimed at instilling the spirit of nationalism and patriotism in the minds of the people that constitute those nations. A typical example refers to the number of programs the Nigerian government implemented following the end of the Nigerian-Biafra civil war. Among these programs are: the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC), Federal Character, the introduction of Civic/or Citizenship Education programs, etc.

This paper therefore tends to explore the notion of nation-building, analyze Civic Education both in its formal and informal status, as well as suggest reasons most countries should adopt the paradigm as a catalyst for their nation-building projects. Above all, this paper is only an attempt to join legion of social change advocates in lending voice to the nation-building project. However, due to the limited time allotted to this research, it was difficult accessing a wide range of quality secondary source documents and empirical evidences to strongly support the claims of the work; and this constituted a limitation to the success of the work in significant ways than initially intended.

2. THE CONCEPT OF NATION-BUILDING

The term "nation-building" became fashionable among social and political scientists in the 1950s and 1960s. Those who championed and propounded it were mainly leaders of the academic community in America, such as Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly, and Reinhard Bendix. In 1963, Karl Deutsch and William Foltz co-edited a work entitled *Nationbuilding*. Based on the work, the Wikipedia gives the following insights into the concept of nation-building. Accordingly, it describes nation-building as “constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state... Nation-building aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run”. Furthermore, the Wikipedia observes that since legitimate authority in modern national states is connected to popular rule and majorities, nation-building is the process through which these majorities are constructed. It also observes that nation-building can "involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social harmony and economic growth”³. Following from these therefore, nation-builders are those members of a state who take the initiative to develop the national community through government programs, including national content mass schooling, etc. To Mylonas, national identity which is at the core of nation-building is often constructed deliberately by molding different ethnic groups into a nation, especially since in many newly established states, colonial practices of divide and rule had resulted in ethnically heterogeneous populations.⁴ This explains

² Chukwujekwu S. C., & Anowai E. C., “Violence and Insecurity of Lives and property as the Greatest Challenges to Nation- Building in Emerging Democratic Countries in Africa: Nigeria as a case Study” in *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.19, 2017, P. 33

³<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation-building> (accessed on 2nd April, 2020 @ 10:35am)

⁴ Harris Mylonas (2010). “Assimilation and its Alternatives: Caveats in the Study of Nation-Building Policies”, In *Rethinking Violence: States and Non-State Actors in Conflict*, eds. Adria Lawrence and Erica Chenoweth. BCSIA Studies in International Security, MIT Press.

why the concept of nation-building has been used in the modern times to refer to the efforts of newly independent nations, notably the nations of Africa and also in the Balkans, to redefine the populace of territories that had been carved out by colonial powers or empires without regard to ethnic, religious, or other boundaries. The aim for these reforms is often for the states to become viable and coherent national entities.⁵

From the above submissions, it is indicative that the nation-building project requires some actions. These actions might be in the form of programs, projects or even orientations. In this context, introducing some programs through which the people can get acquainted with the importance of patriotism, the duties and obligations they have to their countries or even the responsibilities their countries have for them, can equally play a part in building a nation. When one enters this domain, we can say that he is educating the citizens; or more aptly called, he is into Civic Education. What follows therefore is an examination of this type of education that only it can be said to be 'civil'.

3. CIVIC EDUCATION AND ITS IMPERATIVE

Civic education so to speak is not only academic orientated, it is also political in nature since it discusses themes of politics. As Amy Gutmann would put it; it is “the cultivation of the virtues, knowledge and skills necessary for political participation⁶. It is that form of education given to a set of people about the *modus operandi* of that particular group for the attainment of better living via the observation of such norms that will be highlighted during the course of the study either formally or informally. Such education seems relevant in every nation-state not only because of the diversity therein, but also for what it tends to bring. Other authors conceive civic education to be “that form of education which is primarily designed and organised in content and function so as to produce good and useful people who know what happens within the country and globally”⁷. In the real sense of the word, ‘civility’ which has civic as its root word relates to the city and its citizen. A citizen is ‘a native of a country or state, or a naturalised member of it.’ This person by so being incorporated into such state, does not only owe its allegiance to it, but also enjoys *inter alia* the full civil, political and economic rights. Since there cannot be rights without responsibility, the citizen has obligations and duties to carry out towards and in such nation. In the case of Nigeria, the duties of the citizen are explicitly stated in the section 24 in the second chapter of the first part of the 1999 constitution as amended. Among such duties counts; 1) abiding by the constitution, 2) helping in the enhancement of power and the good name of Nigeria, defending Nigeria, 3) respect of the dignity, rights, legitimate interest of other citizens, living in unity in the spirit of brotherhood, 4) positive and useful contribution to the well-being of one’s immediate community, et cetera⁸. Civic education becomes worthless if its sole purpose--namely, the development and transformation of the youth into being effective, responsible, good and well informed people who are active and productive in the society--is defeated. It is such education designed especially for the citizens as regards their action in the society that is known as civic education or citizenship education. This kind of education must be wholly academically necessary to be found in the schools. Though commonly associated with the class, it is not exclusive for schools. Making this palpable, a famous quote reads “town meeting are to liberty

⁵ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation-building> (accessed on 2nd April, 2020 @ 10:35am)

⁶ Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New York, 1987, p. 287.

⁷ Ukegbu Merry et al (eds.), *Basic Civic Education for Senior Secondary Schools*, Meybiks Nigeria publishers, Owerri, 2011, p. X.

⁸ The Federal Republic of Nigeria (promulgation) Decree, 1999, Decree no. 24, 5th May 1999, sec. 24, chap. 1, part. 1

what primary schools are to science; they bring in within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and how to enjoy it" apologies to Tocqueville. Civic education does not only restrict to the teachers in the classroom, but also by way of extension, to the family, the community gatherings, the different houses of worship, sports clubs and other social gatherings.

Civic education today can be placed alongside the Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian teachings regarding the state. These three figures have the priority of moral conduct in the state as their point of rendezvous. It is with this knowledge of moral conduct which forms the bedrock of civic education that one could know oneself and consequently be oneself. It then means that the man with the knowledge of self could be the philosopher king of Plato who will know that the same things which are best for the state are equally good for the individual⁹. In this connection therefore, education should be morally tinted; and Civic Education which has its starting point in the human person, should be more of a moral education.

Though civic education dates back to the ancient 'theory of civics' by Confucius of the ancient China in the East, and the golden age philosophers of the ancient Athens in the West, today it has become an imperative for both those to be ruled and those who are rulers for the betterment of the society. Without Civic Education as the catalyst for good character in the society, representative democracy would turn into 'democracy', and aristocracy turns into 'timocracy'. By examining the contents of Civic Education from the Nigerian context, we may get an insight as to why an absence of such education thereof may ruin the democratic stability of a nation.

4. CONTENTS OF CIVIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

De facto, one might be spurred to know what content has this kind of education, what are being learnt in the education about civics. To that effect, we are poised to aver without bewilderment that this citizenship education has as its preoccupation as follows; first and above all, it is geared towards the exposition of students and the general public to the fundamental principles or axioms and provisions of the Nigerian constitution. And so to this effect, it is worthwhile for every good meaning Nigerian Citizen to possess a copy of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria being the supreme will of the people of Nigeria and be abreast with its contents Secondly, it includes the creation of the consciousness and awareness of the political institutions; its functions and structures, democratic principle as regards the nature of Nigerian government, and most importantly that of the Nigerian social values whether intrinsic or extrinsic which counts honesty, justice, selflessness, non-complacency.

Next, it contains also a highlight on the national objectives which include the attainment of a free and democratic society, a just and egalitarian civilisation, a strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic society and a land of bright and full of opportunities for all citizens.

As a society conscious of itself with the future at heart, issues like fundamental human rights are of paramount significance. This is because "every man bears the whole stamp of the human condition", apologies to Michael de Montaigne. Even as "rights that do not flow from duty well performed are not worth having" said Mohandas Gandhi. Its concern is to aid the citizens understand these rights and its implication, conscious of the fact that when their rights pose a threat on another's, it can be withdrawn from them since peace and order are primary goal of any human society.

⁹ Plato, *Politics*, 1333^b, 37.

Ills of Cultism, youth empowerment, respect for constituted authority, electoral codes, law and order, also form the corpus of the study. This is because these are issues of the moment, and it will go a long way to aid all and sundry if the concepts are well understood.

Finally, it covers a campaign for peace bearing in mind that peace is not only a value, the fruit of justice and love, but also is built up day after day in the pursuit of a social order and can flourish only when all recognize that everyone is responsible for promoting it. Thus, while preaching against all forms of tribalism, sectionalism, nepotism, regionalism, god-fatherism and unnecessary favouritism; the appraisal of meritocracy and communalism bounded by brotherhood in the nation is lauded. Anything other than this will inevitably usher in unrest in the society¹⁰.

It is worthy to note that there are various methods and approaches with which the knowledge of Civic Education can be acquired. Be it in the formal or informal settings, Enyiaka et al has pointed out that citizens of a state often acquire the knowledge about the values of those states through one or more of the following approaches:

1. **Enquiry method:** This involves research field study and investigation of events, social issues and human problems.
2. **Observation:** This is done through participation and observation of social and contemporary events, for example, elections, voting, campaigns, and so on.
3. **Interview method:** This involves interviewing principal actors or authorities in relevant fields.
4. **Excursion:** This involves field trips, excursions to relevant organizations or institutions for fact finding.
5. **Debates and Drama:** Here, students or even non-students as the case may be, engage in debates for and against different proposals of interest.
6. **Audio Visual:** This involves general media programmes (news on radio and television), cinema and film show, etc.
7. **Discussion:** This involves interchanging ideas, views and experiences.¹¹

5. PROBLEMS WITH CIVIC EDUCATION AND RESPONSES

We can do what we can do only if we know what we can do and how to do it. It means that to do it one has to undergo a process of education in connexion to the activity so desired. Besides so many wonderful responses to the contents of and reasons for this education, arguments against it have always caught our attention. They include that:

Civic education rather than educating the citizens, indoctrinate them accounting for lack of novelty. Here, the question of whether teachers should teach a prescribed morality, often closely linked to certain religious ideas and ideals, or should they teach a content only of secular values related to democratic character, forms the problematic stemming from the criticism afore-stated. On the contrary, we assert that the question of critics here is not even well formulated, because the role of the teacher (or more aptly called “the educator”) should not be to ‘teach’ as such, but to spark off thoughts on topical issues by way of knowledge facilitation. So if critics conceive the role of the Civic teacher as that of a pastor laying down the commandments of morals, that would then be a problem on their (critics’) side and not for the outright intention of the program.

¹⁰ Ukegbu Merry et al (eds.), *Basic Civic Education for Senior Secondary Schools*, Meybiks Nigeria publishers, Owerri, 2011, p. 2.

¹¹ Enyiaka, J.U, Aminigo I.M and Osaat, S. D. (2018). “Basis of Civic Education in the Philosophy of Aristotle: A Nigerian Reflection” In *International Journal of Research & Review*, Vol. 5. Issue. 9 (2018) 37-38.

However, if on the course of discussion, teachers and learners arrive at positions that overlap with cultural values or religion based morality, we then see that only as a side effect. Even at that, we may admit that morality is a universal concept that when accessed, can be particularized and interpreted in a context. Judging from the tradition of Aquinas, what authenticates a moral action shoots from the fact that the morality of human act must depend on the object chosen, the end in view or the intention, and the circumstances of the action. That is to say that “a morally good act requires the goodness of its object, of its end, and of its circumstances together” simultaneously¹². So, since civic education is all about morals, and we do not have yet a generally agreed methodology of accessing those morals, we would therefore suggest the Civic teacher experiments maybe, with the principles set out by Aquinas above.

On the other hand, the question, should our teachers teach a form of values clarification in which the citizen’s moral positions are identified but not criticized¹³. This line of thought appeared with the topic of value clarification, which was misunderstood as acculturation- a threat to the local culture. Both the indoctrinations and the value clarification are like the two legs of reality (‘is’ or ‘is not’) for the doctrine which is inducted has a need for clarification and those values are contained in the doctrine which bears the ‘do’s and ‘don’ts’. And this emergence was obtained in the polis of the Greeks in the West where teachers teach a way of life that has been formatted or reform the citizen, probably unknowingly, but conscious of the fact of formation within. However, to the above posed question, we would answer that our society is characterized by a community of ideas; and it is these ideas that form the guiding principles for personal morality. Drawing from these therefore, we argue that although the major responsibility of the teacher is to spur thoughts on moral issues, he could as well shape those thoughts in a very minimal way using the moral ideas provided by the society. If critics are against this, we think then they (critics) bear the burden of telling us how a minor for instance, can make informed moral decisions in the face of “thick description” of moral choices where the teacher has refused to identify the moral positions of the society!

Adding to these, Murphy argues that although civic virtues are important for citizens and must be learned, it does not follow however, that those virtues must be learned in school. To him, the claim by the advocates of Civic Education that the subject provides a moral purpose for schools, fail to grasp that the very activity of imparting knowledge which schools do is itself a moral purpose. Murphy concludes that empirical evidences abound which show that civic education is counterproductive at best; in fact, the history of civic schooling shows that the subject is inherently partisan and by extension subordinates the truth-seeking mission of learning, etc.¹⁴ Although Murphy may be right in asserting that Civic Education as taught in public schools may be a tool in the hands of politicians in championing their agenda, we do not believe however that the subject is totally counterproductive. Civic Education as taught in Nigerian schools for instance, makes the individual aware of some moral ideas which he can compliment with his own personal judgements. So, to discredit the relevance of Civic Education in the face of few empirical evidences is to throw the inherent evaluative power of the human mind overboard!

6. CONCLUSION

¹² Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*, CCC. 1760

¹³ Swartz, R. and Parks, S. (1992) *Infusing Critical and Creative Thinking into Content Instruction*, Pacific Grove, CA: Critical Thinking Press and Software. Pg. 47.

¹⁴ James Bernard Murphy (2007). “Against Civic Education in Public Schools”, In *International Journal of Public Administration*. Vol. 30: 6-7 (2007)pp662-668

By way of conclusion, we have seen that civic education *sui generis* is a *sine qua non* not only for any developing nation, but also for developed nations so as not to forget or misappropriate those values, but that they may retain and refresh what has gone into them and keep on. Therefore in the rage and heat of political revolutions, civic education and its objectives should be at the heart of all our endeavours without opting for violence where the choice of diplomacy and peace calls. Civic education whenever and however it is being undertaken has the sole intention to help create a perfect society where peace and justice would reign. Its benefits are great for it will help people to understand in a jiffy what being a citizen is like and ought to be and how to build a nation of their dream.

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